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ABSTRACT

English is now the leading foreign language in Croatia. Within the framework of a general reform of the Yugoslavian education system, between 1972 and 1975, a particular attempt has been made to reform the ELT program in the four-year secondary-school cycle. One important distinction to be made was that of the differing needs of students in the technical program and those in the humanistic program. Therefore, performance objectives were to be set for English for Special Purposes, and for English for General Communicative Purposes. Curriculum reform was to be carried out in the areas of: syllabus design; textbook rewriting and adoption of new materials; the multi-media approach; individualized instruction; and teacher training courses. Teachers have enjoyed full participation in decision-making, and student motivation has been taken into account throughout the period. The Croatian Education Department has also included outside groups in its planning. Experimental materials have been developed for use with radio, television, and documentary series. The possibility is being examined of Croatian publishing houses producing modular materials for use in Croatian secondary schools. In addition, non-Yugoslav expertise has been invited in the form of workshops, consultations, etc. Although many problems remain, it is felt that the reform represents a break from a structuralist to a pragmatic and eclectic approach, and that further progress can only be made with experience. (AM)

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ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA, YUGOSLAVIA: SOME RECENT DEVELOPMENTS - P B Early (British Council English Language Officer, Yugoslavia)

THE PURPOSE of this article is to describe some recent developments in ELT in the Republic of Croatia, Yugoslavia, with particular reference to curriculum reform at secondary-school level. It is my intention to set out the background against which the following article by Keith Johnson, of the University of Reading, should be read.

Croatia (capital: Zagreb) is one of the six autonomous republics which make up the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia. Education in Yugoslavia is organised on a republican basis and relatively decentralised. Socialist self-management is the main decision-making process in education, as in other spheres, and this means that teachers have a major say in professional decisions, while the Republican Education Department (known as the Zavod) gives the lead. Foreign Language Advisers (not Inspectors) plan and coordinate foreign-language teaching for the Republic and its regions. Five languages (English, French, German, Russian and Italian) are taught in four-year cycles (primary: 10- to 14-year-old pupils; secondary: 15- to 19-year-old pupils). English is now the leading foreign language in Croatia. (For further details, see the ELT profile of Yugoslavia, the British Council, ETIC, 1975.)

The ELT profession is, on the whole, well organised in Croatia and benefits from a number of favourably disposing factors which are perhaps worth enumerating here. The University of Zagreb sets a high standard in the teaching of English and linguistic research, and a good proportion of its graduates become teachers of English. Regular in-service teacher-training consisting of residential seminars is organised by energetic Foreign Language Advisers at republican and regional levels, and continuity is maintained by regular teachers' days and monthly meetings held in some 30 teachers' centres throughout the Republic. For the past 10 years, the British Council and United States Information Service have actively supported the in-service teacher programme in Croatia as well as in the other Yugoslav republics. An important organ for the diffusion of information about the teaching of foreign languages and the relevant background disciplines is the Zagreb quarterly Strani Jezici, edited by Professor R Filipović, which regularly publishes key articles by Croatian teachers and linguists, as well as those of visiting specialists, in Serbo-Croatian translation. The Zagreb Institute of Phonetics and several adult education institutes are also active in teaching, publishing and research. There are a number of progressive Školska Knjiga and Institut za Strane Jezike. Zagreb Schools Radio and particularly Schools Television have worked closely with the Education Department in evolving a multi-media approach to foreign-language teaching and teacher-training. So much by way of general background.

The period 1972-5 covered in this article has been a particularly intense one for ELT in Croatia. It has coincided with a period of profound reappraisal of the aims of foreign-language teaching in the world at large and with a period of general curriculum reform within the Yugoslav education system. In this climate of creative disorientation and upheaval, the aim of the Croatian Education Department has been to find ways of reforming the foreign-language curriculum to meet the needs of learners of foreign language in Croatian schools both at primary and at secondary level. Although the aim has been to revise the curriculum over the full eight-year

period of foreign-language study, particular emphasis has been laid, in the period discussed, on the four-year secondary-school cycle (15- to 19-year-old age group) with the initial focus on the two final years of secondary schooling.

An attempt was to be made to distinguish between the needs of pupils in the upper classes of vocationally oriented secondary schools, the so-called technical schools, and those of humanistic grammar schools (gimnazije). (In 1975, however, this distinction of terms was abolished and replaced by the single term of secondary school. Differentiation of programmes will, however, be maintained in the two final years of secondary-school study.)

Right at the outset (1973) the Croatian Education Department accepted that there were theoretical as well as practical objections to embarking immediately upon the process of rewriting the ELT syllabus. There was the difficulty of defining performance objectives for the technical and humanities streams of the upper secondary school, which in turn involved drawing a distinction between English for Special Purposes and English for General Communicative Purposes. At the same time it was recognised that a mere updating of the previous structurally oriented syllabus was likely to prove inadequate. It was therefore decided to adopt a broad and comprehensive view by identifying a series of distinct but nevertheless related levels of curriculum reform. Work was to proceed with identifying performance objectives within this experimental framework. Specific contributions were looked for in the following areas:

1. The ELT syllabus, distinguishing between the needs of students in general and scientific-technical streams.

2. Textbook reform (to include rewriting out-of-date materials and producing or adopting new materials wherever the need was felt).

3. The development of the multi-media approach.

4. An approach to individualisation in the foreign-language classroom.

5. As a result of 4, it was recognised that teacher attitudes would have to undergo radical change and that this could be achieved through teacher-training courses. It was recognised further that a student-centred approach would involve a fundamental change in the student/teacher relationship which the student as well as the teacher would have to adjust to.

Essentially the Croatian approach could be described as multi-level and dynamic rather than as linear and chronological. Syllabus, materials and teacher-training should evolve simultaneously. The risk implicit in such an approach is confusion over interim aims and tactics. The potential advantages are that feedback is assured by a constant process of interaction all down the line that links the curriculum planner with the main subject of his concern - the pupils in the classroom.

Early then in the process of ELT curriculum reform in Croatia, the Croatian Education Department decided to delay codification of an ELT syllabus until a new general orientation, practical and theoretical, had been worked out. This new approach was achieved by a series of measures. First of all, teachers were given freedom in the selection and use of ELT materials. Experimentation under the term 'kreativno učenje' or 'creative teaching' was encouraged. Teachers were consulted on all matters relating teaching aims

to methods and materials as well as on new approaches to classroom organisation and management, such as group-work and individualisation. Pupil interest - the motivation factor - was taken into account in the elaboration of new materials. Theoretical and practical insights into the methodology of ELT were outlined and demonstrated in a series of teacher-training seminars. (The term 'seminar', as employed in Yugoslavia, implies an exchange of ideas as well as the communication by experts of a body of information to teachers in the field.) Dr Renzo Titone, Professor Pit Corder, Professor David Harris, Dr Earl Stevick, Dr Henry Widdowson, Professor Louis Trimble, Robert O'Neill and Keith Johnson were among those who took part in a series of a dozen seminars held with Anglo-American support during the period 1972-5. Specialised seminars were devoted to Psycholinguistics, Sociolinguistics, Scientific and Technical English (a series of three seminars), Creative Language-Teaching, Communicative Language-Teaching, Applied Linguistics, Textbook-Writing, and New US Approaches to ELT (including G Curran's Community Language-Learning and C Gattegno's Silent Way). In this series of seminars an attempt was made to work out the relevance of current thinking in applied linguistics to curriculum development, to teachers' and students' attitudes, and to classroom practice in the teaching of foreign languages in Croatia, and a degree of consensus on the methodological approach to be adopted has recently begun to emerge. The main trends in this approach to be discerned thus far are the following:

1. Student interest areas point to the adoption of topic-based projects in which English is envisaged as a tool for obtaining relevant information.

2. While it is recognised that learning a foreign language involves the acquisition of distinct sub-skills, no a priori distinction should be drawn which involves the primacy of any one skill or set of skills over any other. The receptive skills of listening and reading should be accorded equal priority with the productive skills of speaking and writing. The emphasis is on teaching integrated language skills in a classroom context of activity and variety.

3. There is recognition of the need for a 'communicative' approach to English teaching in which the functional or rhetorical value of an utterance should be accorded at least an equal place alongside its formal or systematic characteristics. This is particularly the case at the post-intermediate or advanced level under discussion.

4. Psycholinguistic considerations point to the need to place the learner at the centre of the teaching/learning process. Classroom group-work and individualisation are therefore recommended as a practical means to achieving this end.

5. The use of authentic language materials in ELT is considered more likely to promote realistic strategies for acquiring L2 in the learner than over-exposure to structurally graded models of language.

6. Documentary film is recognised as a unique medium for demonstrating the transactional value of language in its natural sociolinguistic setting. Hence the need for a multi-media approach in which television would play a key role.

7. Simulation and role-playing techniques are recognised as language-learning models which have the advantage of involving the learner in realistic communication practice in the context of which meaningful and appropriate language can be acquired and reinforced.

8. It is recognised that student errors may be a valuable source of information concerning the transitional state of the learner's competence in the L2. Contrastive analysis can provide additional insights here.

9. The need is felt to reconcile understanding of basic linguistic structure and process - the cognitive level - with active mastery of language in performance - the motor-skills level - in an integrated approach.

10. At this stage it is not thought desirable to determine upon a particular new methodological bias but rather to continue to experiment with innovative language-teaching techniques on an eclectic and pragmatic basis.

During the period under review, experimental ELT materials were produced by Council staff and their colleagues for Radio-Television, Zagreb (RTVZ). These take the form of two loose-leaf folders for the RTVZ series 'Talking about Britain', providing suggestions for classroom exploration of the ORTF series 'A Holiday in London Town' and John Schlesinger's well-known documentary 'Terminus', which portrays a day in the life of Waterloo Station. These materials were designed for use in the humanities stream of the upper secondary school. They include problem-solving exercises, role-playing, project work, authentic listening comprehension material, pop songs, poetry and material intended for intensive and extensive reading.

Parallel to this, a team of Yugoslav teachers working under the chairmanship of Professor Louis Trimble have produced a Scientific and Technical English Reader for use in the upper technical stream. This reader, published by Školska Knjiga, is to be accompanied by cineloops showing scientific and technical processes designed for exploitation in the second language.

The possibility of a major publishing venture with the aim of producing 'modular' materials for use in Croatian secondary schools, with provision both for technical and for humanities streams is at present being examined. Experimentation to date suggests that a magazine format may be preferable to a monolithic textbook or textbooks. Longman representatives have played a helpful part in planning discussions.

Robert O'Neill, whose own textbooks have aroused a good deal of interest, has recently held a textbook-writing workshop in Zagreb for Croatian textbook writers, in which problems of reconciling the structural with the functional approach in materials design were analysed, among others.

Against this background and in view of the interest aroused in Croatia by David Wilkins's Council of Europe publications, the Croatian Department of Education decided to invite a consultant in applied linguistics from the University of Reading to visit Croatian secondary schools and to prepare a set of proposals for a new secondary-school syllabus in ELT. This visit was carried out under the auspices of the British Council by Keith Johnson in September/October 1975, when a seminar with key teachers and advisers was held. The proposals to which the following article refer were submitted to the Croatian Education Department. In these proposals Keith Johnson examines the viability of the functional approach to ELT curriculum reform in Croatia. The Croatian Education Department is at present examining these proposals which will be used as a basis for further elaboration and as guidelines for textbook writers and planners. Considerable interest has been shown in them by Foreign Language Advisers of other Yugoslav republics in the context of the general reform of the secondary-school syllabus.

In conclusion, it may be said that the Croatian Education Department has not attempted to plan curriculum development in a vacuum. Instead it has encouraged experimentation and involvement on the part of teachers and their students ('creative teaching'). Similarly the Department has invited a variety of bodies not directly responsible for planning decisions to associate themselves with problems of curriculum development, notably RTVZ and the Croatian publishing houses. It has also welcomed cooperation with non-Yugoslav experts in the field of ELT textbook-writing, the media, and applied linguistics.

Reference has already been made to the 1973 decision to defer work on a new curriculum until a new general orientation, practical and theoretical, had been worked out. In retrospect this looks like the right decision since it is only by practical experimentation backed up by a search for an adequate rationale that the right decisions can be arrived at and tested against experience. It has been shown that teacher education can proceed parallel with educational planning by associating teachers with the ongoing process of curriculum development.

The methodological approach which has emerged from this process after a period of intensive activity can be best described as pragmatic and eclectic. The break with the behaviourist-structuralist orientation has been achieved, but the need for 'skill-getting' alongside 'skill-using' is still explicitly recognised. What the Croatian Education Department is now interested in is a curriculum which goes some way towards reconciling and integrating these only apparently conflicting requirements.

However, many serious problems remain to be resolved, of which the following are perhaps the most important:

1. The need to reconcile the functional and structural approaches within a rational and coherent framework which will make provision both for general and for technical streams. Keith Johnson's proposals have set out the general direction in which work should proceed.

2. The need to translate this syllabus into adequate language-teaching materials. This means training a new generation of textbook writers to write a whole range of unfamiliar exercises (including those of a 'functional' or 'notional' type).

3. The need to develop teacher-training to the point where not just the gifted but all teachers can cope with a new and demanding methodology in which 'functional' and 'notional' materials will play a part.

4. The need to persuade teachers of the potential of the multi-media approach to ELT.

5. Finally, there is an acute need to evaluate all the experimental work which has been carried out with a view to preserving only those elements which have been shown to lead to effective and economic L2 acquisition.